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BUZZARDS IN RELATION TO DISEASES OF STOCK.

There has been much agitation in recent years against the buzzard as a distributor of hog cholera and other stock diseases, but those who hope to prevent these epizootics by exterminating the buzzard should not lose sight of the fact that this bird is only one of many agents concerned in the spread of stock diseases.

Hog cholera and similar diseases are carried in various ways, the chief long distance distribution being caused by shipment of diseased animals, local distribution by mechanical transportation of the germs on the feet or other parts of the body of various animals, and in the feces of scavengers which have fed on the carcasses of diseased stock.

So far as distribution of the germs of stock disease in feces is concerned, the buzzard has a better record than any other carrion feeder. This has been scientifically demonstrated by Drs. S. T. Darling and L. B. Bates, in Panama, and Dr. Harry Morris in Louisiana. (See Amer. Vet. Rev. 42, No. 1, October, 1912, pp. 70-75, and Bulletin 136, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, November, 1912.) The investigations reported in these publications conclusively prove that spores of anthrax are destroyed in the digestive tract of the buzzard, but that they pass uninjured through the bodies of dogs, hogs, cats, opossums, chickens, and flies. In most of these animals virulent spores are present in the alimentary tract and in the feces from 2 to 6 days after carrion has been eaten. Thus a dog, which has fed on an animal killed by anthrax, may disseminate spores of the disease anywhere that it goes for as many as six days thereafter. The damage that may result from the spread of disease by the multitude of prowling dogs, cats, and other animals so numerous on farms, is simply incalculable. The buzzard, on the contrary,

must be completely exonerated from blame for this type of disease spreading.

Buzzards undoubtedly sometimes carry the germs of stock diseases on their feet, but so also do dogs, cats, chickens, pigeons, horses, cows, and other domestic animals. The diseases are distributed also by man and last, but by no means least, by flies.

Since man and all domestic animals are known to distribute stock diseases, it is unjust to attempt to place the chief responsibility upon a wild bird which is never closely associated with diseased stock.

The comparative unimportance of the buzzard as a carrier of stock diseases is further proved by the fact that severe epizootics of hog cholera occur where this useful scavenger is very rare, as in Wisconsin and eastern Washington, and even where it is practically entirely absent, as in Ontario, Quebec, and other Canadian Provinces.

Summarizing: Hog cholera, anthrax, and other contagious stock diseases prevail in regions where there are no buzzards. This is positive proof that extermination of the buzzard will not eradicate these diseases.

In regions where the buzzard occurs it is only a minor agent in disease distribution. It is the only carrion feeder known that does not distribute anthrax bacilli in its feces. So far as distribution on the feet, etc., is concerned, other animals, as dogs, opossums, and swine, are just as apt to contaminate water as the buzzard, and dogs and chickens are far more likely to carry infection by bodily contact with other domestic animals. Before farmers take steps to exterminate the buzzard, they should remember that they are harboring several domestic animals that have far greater possibilities as disease carriers. The

fact that the diseases may be distributed by flies is quite enough to explain the most severe epizootics.

However, the chief blame lies with man himself. The neglect to properly dispose of carcasses is the factor most responsible for continuance and spread of stock diseases. It is inexcusable to wage warfare upon a bird which cannot harm us unless we give it the opportunity by our own criminal negligence. Let farmers promptly bury or burn all animals dying on their premises and thereby remove the primary cause of the spread of stock diseases.

